

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 159 647

CS 004 390

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The Mismatch of Child Language and School Language:
Implications for Beginning Reading Instruction. Open
Discussion of Shuy Presentation.

INSTITUTION

Pittsburgh Univ., Pa. Learning Research and
Development Center.

SPONS AGENCY

National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.

PUB DATE

Apr 76

CONTRACT

400-75-0049

NOTE

16p.; Discussion presented at the Conference on
Theory and Practice of Beginning Reading Instruction,
University of Pittsburgh, Learning Research and
Development Center, April 1976; For Shuy
presentation, see ED125315

EDRS PRICE

MF-\$0.83 HC-\$1.67 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS

Beginning Reading; *Child Language; Conference
Reports; *Effective Teaching; *Language Development;
*Language Role; *Language Skills; Language Styles;
Linguistic Theory; Primary Education; *Reading
Instruction; Standard Spoken Usage

ABSTRACT

The discussion following Roger Shuy's presentation on "The Mismatch of Child Language and School Language" focuses on the value of studying language functions, the problems associated with identifying those language functions and their stages of development, and whether knowledge of such language functions will increase reading teacher effectiveness. Treating language as a set of functional components to be learned and applied in appropriate situations (such as using language to precise, to be invited, or to infer correct answers on tests from context clues) has just begun, but the initial research is encouraging. Moreover, knowledge of language functions may be of special value to reading teachers rather than to students learning to read, since teachers could concentrate on observing students' effective language usage rather than having students imitate artificial standards of "correct" intonation and grammar. Although the study of language functions would only be one part of a general reading program, continued research into this area of reading instruction should improve reading teacher effectiveness.

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The Mismatch of Child Language and School Language:
Implications for Beginning Reading Instruction.
Open Discussion of Shuy Presentation.

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Conferences supported by a grant to the Learning Research and Development Center from the National Institute of Education (NIE), United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, as part of NIE's Compensatory Education Study. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of NIE, and no official endorsement should be inferred. NIE Contract #400-75-0049.

Conference on Theory and Practice of Beginning Reading Instruction,
University of Pittsburgh, Learning Research and Development Center,
April 1976.

OPEN DISCUSSION OF SHUY PRESENTATION

STICHT: One of the problems we have had, in designing programs has been to determine what to do about functional language. Do you think the function called "giving an order" is a generic competence, which could be present or absent in an individual, or do you think that function might be there in the general sense without being realized in a particular context? _

SHUY: On the basis of some limited evidence, gathered during the last six months from video tapes of 4 to 8 year olds, I believe that there are stages in the acquisition of these functions. Kids acquire these functions at different stages at different times, just as they acquire phonology and grammar at different stages. We may have the same situation that we had in the illustration I gave of the child I observed. The child had the incomplete "promise" function; he hadn't yet gotten the function to the extent that the adult would have understood it, or even to the extent that his peer would have understood it or appreciated it.

STICHT: I don't think I comprehend what you are saying about the child not having the promise function.

SHUY: He was promising, but he didn't have Grice's principle, the principle of value, under control yet. He was promising, but he didn't have his peer's value system, which is the same value system of promises that the adult has; namely, that if you are going to promise something, it has to be of value. He was promising something, but it was really a rotten promise, he promised only to be his friend. He had promising under control, he didn't have effective promising.

under control.

STICHT: What is the distinction between something called promising as a generic kind of competence and some specific knowledge about given individuals in situations that help you determine what promise to make and what language to use to express the promise.

SHUY: You are talking about the generic categories. I don't think we have an inventory of what they are yet; that is why we are doing the study now, to see if we can discover whether or not 5 year olds acquire promises that 4 year olds don't have.

I can cite an example. A five-year-old neighbor girl came across the street and knocked on my door at 6:30 in the evening. She said, "Mr. Shuy, if you look across the street, you will see that both of our cars are gone." I looked across, and "Sure enough, Joanna, both of your cars are gone." She said, "You know, my mother worries if I miss meals." I said, "Joanna, would you like to come in?" She said, "Yes," and she came in. She said, "You know, I eat almost anything." Obviously, Joanna was developing a competence toward getting herself invited.

I think these language functions are acquired in some way. The episode is funny, because Joanna hasn't got it under control. Much of the childhood behavior we laugh about is funny, because children haven't got the complete competence structure yet. Certainly, she has a concept of getting invited. If the generic category is "How do you get invited," she is doing it. She is not doing it in an adult fashion yet, however.

STICHT: I mentioned an oracy training program this morning. I presume that

could map somewhat onto this kind of thing. In that program there was the attempt to teach something called the oracy school of naming. Well, what that ended up being was the process of learning the names of some dimensions, not a competence called naming, because all of the children named something; they named their parents; they named their sisters and brothers.

And so there you have an example of why you have to have names for activities, when you have a program. I am wondering how this might be any better than, say, the existing lists of things, which you find in, for instance, Bloom and Hastings and Courtney Cazden's chapter on teaching language, that has all of the various categories. How do you go about really teaching these things? I mentioned that the one case seems to be almost too behavioristic. Maybe emergent modeling techniques or something similar would be better.

SHUY: At this point, I am not so interested in teaching it as I am in knowing at what level it is present.

I think the major thrust of what we are finding out about functional language acquisition is going to be toward teachers' understanding of the child, rather than toward the development of the child to do these things better and faster. I don't see any reason to do that.

SQUIRE: Roger, to distinguish between adequate and inadequate competence, the functions can be clearly defined, but how would that kind of definition help the teacher except to understand the child's oral language development? What I don't quite see are the implications for development of competence in reading.

SHUY: I think we haven't yet tapped what it is that is interfering with the

child's ability to read or what he is calling on when he is reading. For example, we are beginning to understand a little bit about pragmatic knowledge. Peg Griffin has done a study recently, in which she gave people a paragraph to read. The paragraph reads something like this: "Have you ever traveled in the Philippines, Carol?" asked Elsa."

"Well, I went to Cebu Province; I visited Danau, Maoboal, and Talisay," Carol answered."

After reading this the subjects were asked: "Name three towns in Cebu Province." The people responded, "Maoboal, Talisay and Danau." Now, the paragraph didn't say that. How is it that the child learned this if the text didn't say it? The text didn't say there were three towns in Cebu Province. What the child is calling on is his knowledge of how the real world works or how his language works. What I am saying is that reading materials have not addressed that kind of information.

I think the classic example of mis-tapped pragmatic knowledge is in the standardized text questions themselves, which can be pragmatically read many different ways in some cases. But how do we help the child learn to call on the knowledge he has, his knowledge of how language works, if we are not even aware of how it works?

I would think that there should be some way this could be built into reading materials. We could take advantage of this knowledge, either by avoiding areas of mismatch; that is, by making the pragmatic assumptions of the text itself match those of kids at the right age, so they are not trapped into misreading by something that is pragmatically out of their frame of reference; or secondly, we can actually utilize that skill in building an easier or better or more efficient

text for them to read. Unfortunately, the inventory of possibilities in pragmatic or functional language has not yet been tapped. We don't know as yet what happens between 4, 5, and 6 year olds.

But the kinds of assumptions and presuppositions about how the world works, and about how language works, are not called on in any way that I am aware of in reading materials. That sort of translation needs to be made.

KINTSCH: I am referring to that study, that dialect study from Chicago. If I understand you right, you are saying that the study has empirically positive results, but the theoretical justification for it is really absent. Is that right?

SHUY: Well, I was quoting the text's claim. I am not as impressed with the results as the author appears to be, I was quoting Leaverton himself. While talking to a few of the teachers, I found that the materials were not used in the way that the research claims they were. As far as I know, they are not even used at all at the moment. So I would say that, as Leaverton himself claims, the most useful outgrowth of this study was in the affective area, not in reading.

VENÉZKY: Maybe it's important to point out that even though you and I fully agree on the problems with the contents of the child-oriented materials in the Chicago group, these materials may have a positive influence on teachers. It may turn out that those materials, bad child materials, are the price we have to pay to develop something that we haven't developed in any other way, something designed to change the teacher's attitude. That is the main thing Leaverton found from the study, and it may in fact be a justification.

It may be true of Osterberg's study. This was a study done in Sweden dealing with speakers of an extreme Swedish dialect. When the children who spoke this dialect were introduced to reading with materials developed especially for their dialect, they learned faster than before. But the materials were used only for four or five weeks. The authors found that the materials probably weren't what made the difference. It was the attitude of the teachers, who learned a great deal about the background of the children, had a lot of pep talks on treating children as human beings, and tried not to divorce the children from things they had been reinforced for during the early parts of their lives. It may turn out that there is a way to make the dialect materials less of a focus and still achieve what is actually working there. (The Chicago materials are used, by the way, still.)

SHUY: Still used in Chicago?

VENEZKY: The teacher training is used. I am not sure that the materials are still used. The authors claim they still are, but we can't find a school that uses them.

SHUY: We couldn't find one either.

CHALL: Roger, I am interested in the question of teacher training. I know that the whole push, during the last few years, has been to increase the teacher's awareness of language. Assuming that this, in turn, will help them with the child's language, and, in turn, improve their reading, I wonder what evidence you have for this claim?

SHUY: Mostly the observation of classrooms, and the observation of reading teaching itself. I probably have fewer opportunities to enter classrooms than you have, and although we do get into a number of them, particularly in Virginia, what I see regularly is misdiagnosis of reading problems, or diagnosis of problems which are said to be reading problems, but actually are other things.

CHALL: You get into language problems.

SHUY: They are said to be language problems, but they are not, or they are said to be reading problems, but they are not.

CHALL: So then how would knowledge of language, linguistics, psycholinguistic awareness, and the way it improves with age, help a teacher make a diagnosis, when the problem is neither language nor reading?

GOODMAN: I think the evidence has to be in terms of what you see when you observe teachers' reactions to kids' dialects as the kids are reading. The key problem is not with the student, but with the teacher. Not only black kids, but Appalachian kids and pidgin speaking kids seem to have a lot of receptive control over dialects in addition to their own. I think that fits with Roger's statement about the kind of statistical variability, that the dialects aren't neat and clean, and that people do grow up learning to understand other people's speech, if it is important in their lives and in their communities.

The problem comes in school when the teacher corrects what she tells the children is wrong with their reading, and then it turns out in fact that it was an example of the kid's dialect. Now, the logic of that is that if teachers learn more about language, they are going to have a better understanding of the

source of a certain kind of language use. I think it's a logical thing, and I don't know of any statistical studies that have been done, per se, and it's one of those messy things that is hard to sort out anyway. It's easy to see the evidence of teachers mistaking dialect usage for reading difficulties. There have been a number of studies of teachers doing this.

SHUY: Yes. I was going to cite a teacher workshop that we ran a few years ago for University of Nebraska credit at the Washington, D.C., YWCA. We had teachers from Boston, Dallas, Atlanta, Washington, D.C., and Wellington, Ohio. They were all third-grade teachers, five from each city. And we had texts used by children from each area reading the same passage. On the first day we had the teachers listen to the child reading. We had surreptitiously recorded kids in those communities reading those texts, which are fourth-grade reading materials, to make sure the children made some reading errors. We gave the teachers mimeographed copies of the reading passage, so for each child they could mark on the text, as they listened to it, what the reading errors were.

I discovered many things that teachers considered reading errors: regional dialects, social dialects, pauses, false starts, too much or too little expression. In my own local school system, a little boy who read with no expression was diagnosed as needing a neurological workup. His mother had been talked to by the teacher and told that he needed a complete neurological analysis. He was failing in reading. She told her husband, who happens to be a professor at a local medical school, and he hit the ceiling and called for me to do a quick and dirty analysis. I gave the boy what I call the "Shuy Diagnostic Reading Test," which is a one question test: "Here, read, this." He read beautifully, making all of the right noises. The comprehension test was "Tell me all about it," and he made all of the right statements. What he didn't do is

read with expression. I think this is a clear case of a teacher not understanding the child. The boy was the smallest one in the class. He used rough language and threw himself into his activities with abandon. He wanted to be thought of as a tough kid and he would be darned if he was going to read with expression. That was considered a sissy thing to do. And we ended up by manipulating the scene. We taught my son, who was the biggest kid in the class, to read with expression. That legitimized the activity in the class, so that the little guy could do it. That eventually solved the problem in a most indirect fashion.

RESNICK: If the major effect of teachers not being sensitive to dialect differences lies in teachers correcting children for things that are really not reading errors, but dialect differences, then one would expect substantially better learning to occur when the teachers and the children have the same dialect. Do we have any evidence of that kind?

GOODMAN: You made an assumption that doesn't follow, because sometimes teachers who speak the same dialect are so uptight about their own language, that they are much less tolerant.

RESNICK: Okay. What you are saying is you have to look inside the classrooms a little more, and see what people are doing. Has anybody done that?

VENEZKY: Let me answer that in a roundabout way, by pushing Jeanne's point just a little bit further. First I agreed with Jeanne's point that we have a limited amount of time to train teachers and very little money to get them to special workshops. For many years linguists have said we have to teach teachers to be

good linguists; we have to teach them fieldwork methodology and all that.

Now we are really back-peddling. We have a new "good" functions of language. Now we are saying it's time teachers learn about functions of language. In a very cynical way, there is something very positive about that. It tells us not to pay attention to the minutiae any more, not to worry that a student's past tense isn't like others' past tenses; to pretend you don't know about the past tense; to worry whether the child can communicate in a competent way. Now, those key studies we have, especially in the schools in the Black and the Puerto Rican areas, find no variable that relates to a teacher's language or to children's language; that is, there is no consistency in terms of whether the teacher speaks the same dialect or is of the same ethnic group so far as reading success is concerned.

Now, admittedly we are not talking about a large population or well controlled studies. What does seem to make a big difference is the teacher's attitude towards language. Where we have successful teaching, we tend to find teachers with very positive attitudes, teachers who are very receptive to what the children bring to the classroom.

I suspect not everybody here agrees with that, that the teacher has to know something about what dialect is or isn't. I suspect, though, that what Jeanne is asking is whether we should waste time teaching these language functions to children.

CHALL: Everything is fascinating to learn from a humanistic standpoint. But most teachers today don't even have a basic course in the teaching of reading. And we are fighting, en masse, to get, for all elementary school teachers, more than one reading course. As of 1975 about half of the teachers don't have one

basic course.

The knowledge of language will be ultimately enriching to the teacher. But take Roger's example of the teacher who erroneously labeled the child neurologically impaired. Does that teacher need a course in language or in neurology?

SHUY: She just had one. The problem was she is a victim of her most recent information.

CHALL: The psychiatrists during the 1940's and 1900's recommended all kinds of clinical courses for teachers. Then other specialists followed, till we have almost forgotten to teach the teachers how to teach. It is not that I don't have respect for linguists. We have in our reading program, I am very proud to say, Carol Chomsky, and right across the river, at MIT, we have her husband, Noam Chomsky. The students take linguistics courses at the School of Education, in Arts and Sciences, and at MIT. Yes, I think basically teachers do have to know about language and language development. But all of these things mentioned about dialect are more than dialect alone. You seem to be asking the teacher to give each pupil a right to be a person, a human being, who says things differently, and maybe moves differently, and so on. And I am not so sure that it doesn't come under a general course on how to teach reading, which would include this kind of thing. It's just that there isn't enough time. There isn't enough time to give so many different courses to teachers.

SHUY: I think one of the sins of the past, that Dick responded to is that linguists, in their claim to be relevant, weren't most of the time, and now we are living with that fact. I think we had overpromised and made false promises.

There is no reason to believe that making a linguist out of a child is going to make him a better writer, as far as I can see. That kind of information is more appropriate to the teacher than it is to the child.

CHALL: I am wondering whether being a better linguist makes one a better teacher of reading.

GOODMAN: That is not what I was referring to. The fact is the worst thing you can do is make a teacher feel she has to be a dialectologist to teach black kids or Appalachian kids, when it really comes down to attitudes. But the problem is that attitudes and knowledge run hand in hand, and sometimes you can't get basic knowledge across, if the attitude is that language only comes in two forms, good and bad.

SAMUELS: The discussion seems to have moved to the point where we are now interested in what can we do to improve the pedagogy of reading, and we are beginning to look at single factors, like training the teacher to have an awareness of dialect differences. However, a successful program is built on more than single factors. A number of reading projects have attempted to identify exemplary reading programs and to determine their components. It seems there is a high degree of overlap among the components of exemplary reading programs. These successful programs have strong administrative leadership with an emphasis on reading, a value system which does not condone low achievement, support personnel in the form of teacher aids who have been trained and who directly enter the teaching process along with the teacher, reading specialists who focus on helping teachers and teacher aids, emphasis on decoding skills, human-relations orientation combined with task orientation, and a program which

emphasizes accountability on the part of students as well as teachers.

I think what we have to do is think of single factors not as panaceas in themselves, but as parts of larger systems. We have to begin to think in terms of systems of education that will lead to better reading.

SHUY: I can't disagree with what you are saying. I would think the really honest linguist won't really care if it's called linguistics or not. In fact, I don't think that's a critical issue; the system is more important; the children learning to read are more important than our trying to sell any kind of medicine. I just think we have something to offer that's a little better today than it used to be.

BECK: A couple of years ago in two different instances I observed two teachers interacting with black children. In the first classroom, one child was reading a sentence that said "Nan can color," and the child said, "Nan could color." The teacher stopped and pointed to the word "can." The child looked carefully and said, "Can," and the teacher nodded. Then the child went back and looked at the story and reread, "Nan could color." The teacher let that go. In the second instance, in the classroom next door, as another child was reading the word "hand" in a sentence he said "han." The teacher said, "What?" and pointed to the "d." The child uttered the /d/ sound. Then the child returned to the beginning of the sentence and when he got to "hand" again said "han." The teacher stopped him again. This went on and on and on. Finally I pointed to the word "hand" and asked the child, "Do you have any of these?" When the child nodded, I asked him to show me. He held up his hands. In these two instances, the first teacher demonstrated an understanding of what the student did; the second teacher didn't.

SHUY: The question being asked in education today is about effective participation in the classroom, and it really gets at the question of what is an effective language user. I think there are many ways we can better find that out.

I don't see any evidence in ESL materials, for example, of knowing what really matters in ESL. Why are we teaching -ed's and -ing's, and things like that? There is no research to tell us why. What it means to participate effectively in the classroom may well be gotten at by asking the teacher to nominate effective language users and ineffective language users, then monitoring these children to see what it is the teachers might be seeing in them.

We are also using a speech chain kind of effect. We give the child a task, and then ask him to tell another child who is trying to borrow his toy, "Please don't borrow it, I want you to give it back to me." Now, if he says the same thing to another child that he says to an adult, who is high status, we have learned something about his ability to switch codes.

With these kinds of strategies we are learning something about effective language. We are beginning to scratch the surface, but I think that until we define what we mean by effective language, we are not going to be able to answer the question that Jeanne is asking. I think we can then offer a great deal more to the teacher.

END SESSION